OAR Organizational Health and Culture Assessment (OHCA)

Enterprise-Wide Findings and Recommendations

May 5, 2020

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Project Overview

Project Context

- **Organizational change requires change in structure and processes PLUS change in organizational culture.**

- **A healthy organizational culture builds a strategic framework to incorporate core values within OAR's mission, vision, and strategic goals.**

- **Before OAR can change its culture, it must first understand its existing culture.**

Project Mission

Develop an organizational culture which promotes:

- Enhanced engagement and cooperation among the workforce
- Increased customer, stakeholder, and partner engagement
- Alignment with OAR Strategy

Project Description

AvantGarde will assist OAR with:

- Understanding and assessing the current organizational culture
- Recognizing areas for improvement
- Identifying root causes
- Determining actions to address the root causes
- Implementing actions and solutions

Project Approach

Phase I

Gain initial insight into OAR culture through stakeholder interviews

Phase II

Deploy and assess survey
Facilitate focus groups
Develop recommendations

Phase III

Develop Lab/Office-specific reports and conduct Director discussions

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Organizational Health Dimensions

Mission-Purpose Alignment

Work Motivation

Management Control

Innovation

Stakeholder Value

Autonomy

Inclusion

Communication

Diversity

Collaboration

Job Satisfaction

Organizational Health

Phase I Overview

Interviews

Conducted 23 in-depth interviews with representatives across OAR Labs, Programs, and Headquarters (HQ) Operations

Data Review

Reviewed and assessed previously completed OAR reports, workforce data, and Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) scoring

Dimensions

Identified key dimensions for the Phase II Organizational Health and Culture Assessment (OHCA)

Phase II Overview

Coaching Pilot

May – November 2019

Selected OAR managers participated in a six-month pilot coaching program

Survey

July – August 2019

Custom organizational health and culture survey was developed and administered to all OAR federal, contract, and Cooperative Institute (CI) employees

## Focus Groups

September – October 2019

38 focus groups were conducted at OAR HQ and OAR Labs with a total of 157 volunteers

OHCA Survey Participation by Employee Type

Employee Type	Total Employees	Total Participation	Participation Rate*
Federal	657	424	65%
Cooperative Institute (CI)	937	304	32%
Contractor	521	207	40%
TOTAL	2101	935	45%

Participation rates were calculated based on the number of active OAR Federal employees in the NOAA Management Analysis and Reporting System (MARS) as of July 10, 2019 and the NOAA Directory for the Affiliates at Cooperative Institutes and Contractors.
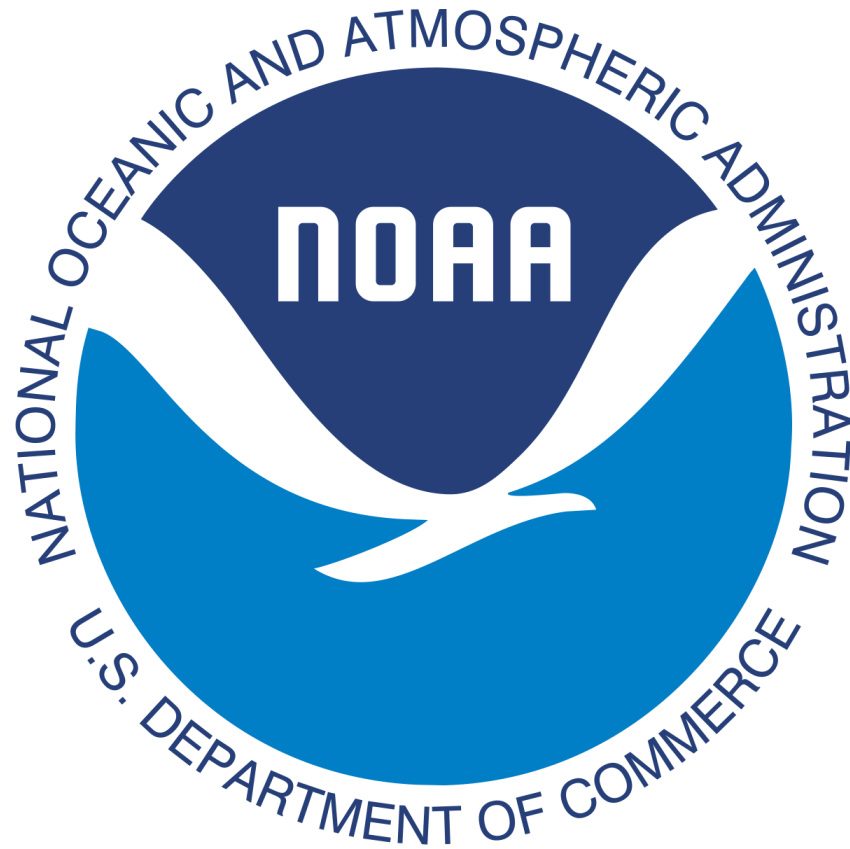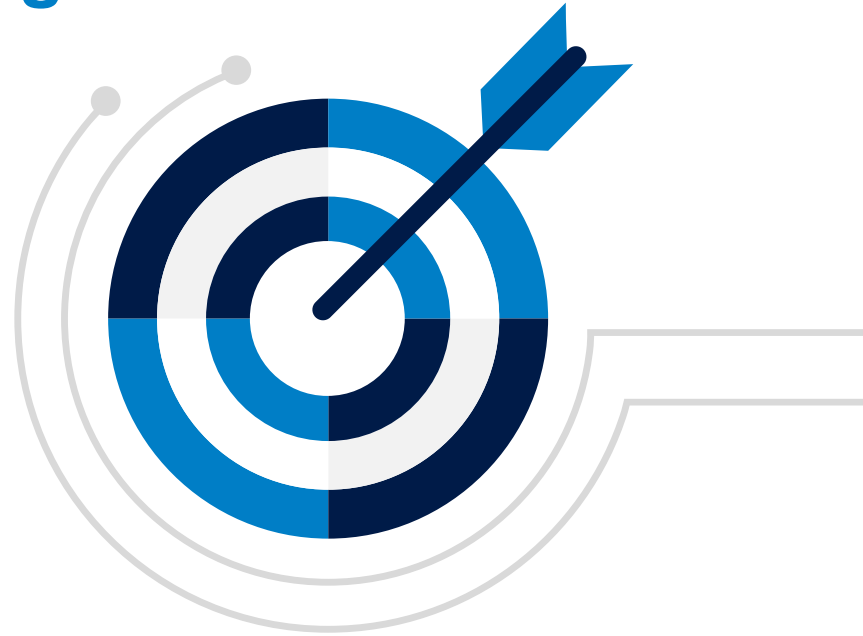
OHCA High-Level Recommendations

OAR is a generally healthy organization…

- Reflected in a staff committed to excellence

- With high job satisfaction

- And a desire to be heard as well as a willingness to debate, engage, and dialogue constructively

…with a strong culture

- Anchored in NOAA's mission and the positive impact of its work

- A character of self-reliance, individual initiative, and respect for peers and partners

- That focuses on what is most important for OAR's and NOAA's success

Communication

Needs

- Improve the level of Lab/Office understanding of data requests and taskers
- Improve performance by providing important information quickly

Recommendations

- Revise standards for data requests and taskers to include rationale, use, and audience for the information and provide feedback on the outcome as follow-up
- AA and DAAs delegate action and decision making on communications when they are unavailable
- Create internal communications community of practice with Lab and Office communications designees focused on best practices and improving communications processes

HIGH-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Diversity and Inclusion

Needs

- Communicate diversity as mission imperative
- OAR must attract, hire, and develop the best science and leadership talent
- Acknowledge the importance of CI and contractor contributions to OAR success

Recommendations

- Emphasize the value of diversity as performance imperative, not gender/racial/ethnic metrics
- Expand recruitment sources to fill the talent pipeline
- Identify internal diversity champions below the executive leadership level to lead and energize the OAR Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee (ODIAC)
- Investigate options on foreign national security protocols
- Identify, communicate, and reinforce inclusive behaviors across all employee-types

HIGH-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy and Process

Needs

- Improvements in the OAR hiring process – at least those that OAR can influence/control

- Clarification of foreign national security requirements to alleviate negative impact on all employees

Recommendations

- Designate a senior leader to champion a project to identify and articulate strategies to:
  - Identify where OAR can improve the hiring process focusing on what OAR controls first, then working with NOAA and the Department of Commerce to shorten "time-to-hire"
  - Build on OAR best practices to recruit and attract a diverse applicant pool for federal positions at all levels
- Assess and articulate the security requirements for foreign nationals and work to reduce the requirements for low security level facilities

HIGH-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Mission-Purpose Alignment

Needs

- Deepen employee understanding of organizational mission, values, and strategic plan and create a clear line of sight

- A greater agreement on the acceptable level of dynamic tension between science as "research to operations" and a broader view of science needs will result in clear direction and less confusion regarding the purpose/motivation for doing the science

Recommendations

- With roll-out of the OAR Strategy, build an employee-level briefing to ensure understanding and alignment at the Lab/Office/Team levels

- Use one Senior Research Council (SRC) meeting per year to discuss and develop path forward regarding the purpose of science, including the acceptable level of dynamic tension and differences

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HIGH-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership Development

Needs

- High proficiency in leadership capability is needed to lead and manage the work internally, mentor/coach/guide the development of others, play leadership roles laterally across OAR, craft external stakeholder relationships, and innovate in science and relationships

- Implementation of the OAR Strategy affords an opportunity to create leadership development programs related to OAR values and organizational change

Recommendations

- Develop and implement an OAR supervisory-to-leadership development program with NOAA or OAR-specific content focusing on the OAR Strategy and values

- Expand coaching program, convene Peer Coaching Circle, and encourage future leaders to take stretch assignments/details when appropriate

- Create a succession plan to address the likely retirements of current OAR leaders and managers
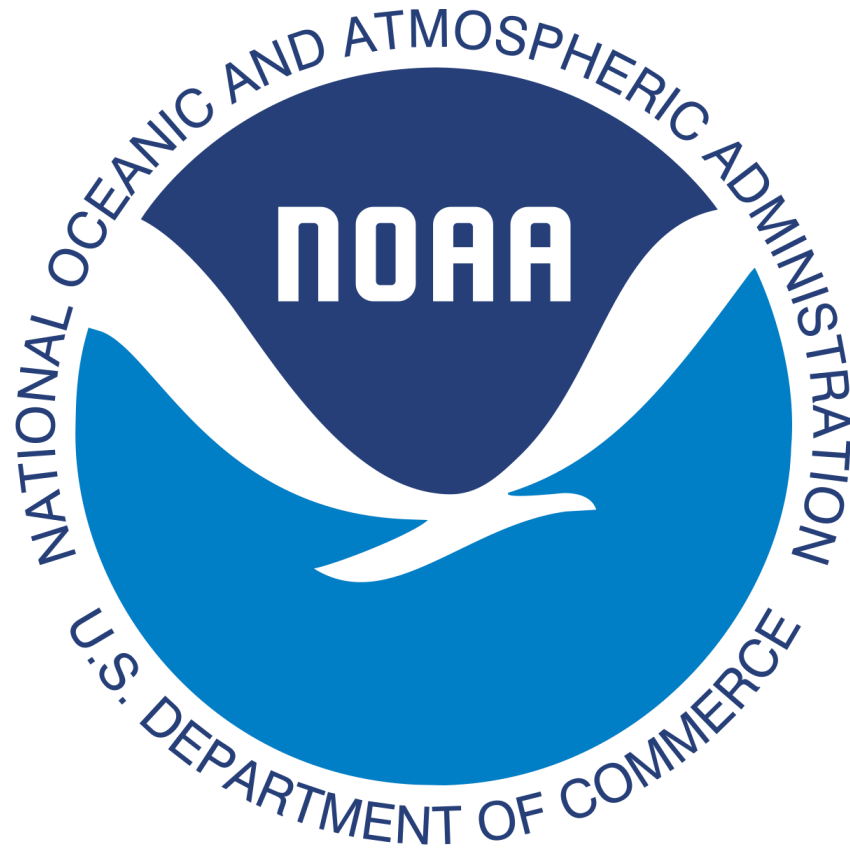
Phase III Next Steps

Phase III Next Steps

Lab/Office-Specific Reports

Develop and distribute Lab/ Office-specific reports

Director Discussions

Schedule and conduct Lab/ Office-specific report discussions with Directors/ Deputy Directors

Phase III Action Items

Meet with ELT to identify further action items and discuss a plan for implementation

Lab/Office-Specific Report Details

Reports will include findings for each of the identified dimensions of organizational health

Findings will be presented by employee-type (federal, contract, CI), when possible
- If there were fewer than ten respondents for one or all employee-types for a dimension, their responses will be aggregated

Lab reports will include comparisons to the cumulative "All Labs" scores and "Enterprise" scores

Office reports will include comparisons to the cumulative "All Offices" scores and "Enterprise" scores

Findings and recommendations for Labs/Offices with fewer than ten total respondents will be aggregated with similar Labs/Offices and will not be reported individually

Questions

If you have any further questions about the OHCA, please contact either:
- **Victor Villones**, OHCA Program Lead, at victor.villones@noaa.gov
- **Gretchen Taylor**, OHCA Technical POC, at gretchen.taylor@noaa.gov
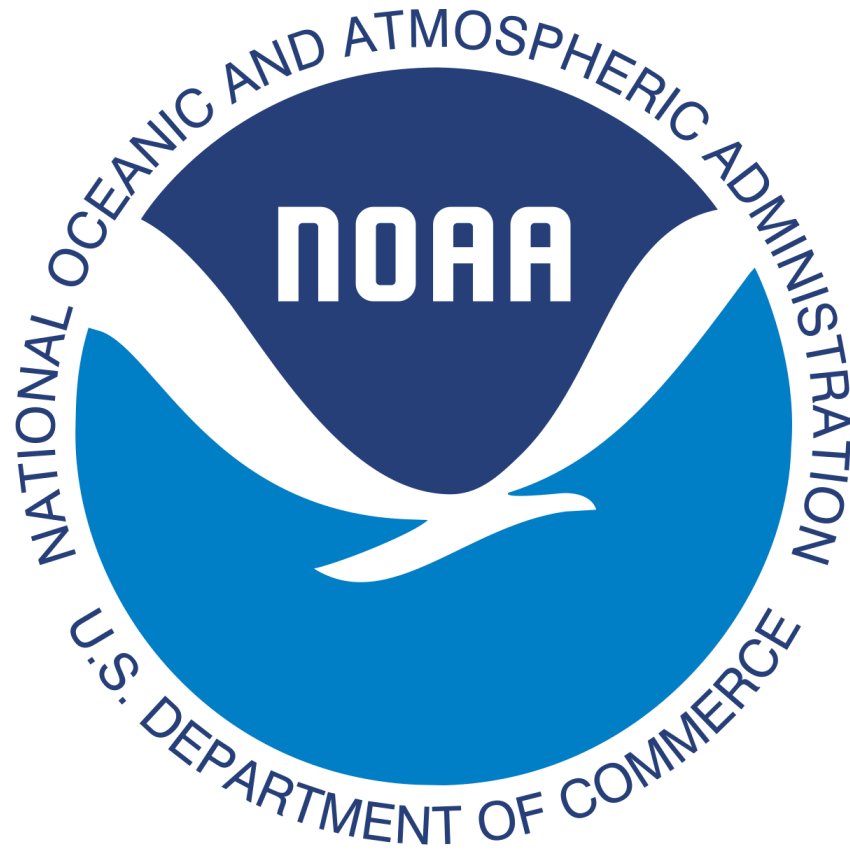
Appendix

OHCA Survey Participation

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HQ STAFF OFFICES	Total Employees	Total Participation	Participation Rate*
OAR HQ Staff Offices* *(ALL)*	183	106	**58%**

PROGRAMS	Total Employees	Total Participation	Participation Rate*
CPO (Climate Program Office)	104	36	**35%**
National Sea Grant College Program	23	14	**61%**
OAP (Ocean Acidification Program)	9	7	**78%**
OER (Office of Ocean Exploration & Research)	51	28	**55%**
OWAQ (Office of Weather and Air Quality)	24	20	**83%**
UAS (Unmanned Aircraft Systems Program)	1	3	**300%**

LABS	Total Employees	Total Participation	Participation Rate*
AOML (Atlantic Oceanographic & Meteorological Lab)	203	94	**46%**
ARL (Air Resources Lab)	71	44	**62%**
ESRL – Chemical Sciences Division	157	56	**36%**
ESRL – Global Monitoring Division	136	49	**36%**
ESRL – Global Systems Division	233	70	**30%**
ESRL – Physical Sciences Division	163	56	**34%**
ESRL – Director's Office/Library	31	13	**42%**
GFDL (Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Lab)	258	82	**32%**
GLERL (Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab)	90	67	**74%**
NSSL (National Severe Storms Lab)	184	90	**49%**
PMEL (Pacific Marine Environmental Lab)	176	84	**48%**

Participation rates were calculated based on the number of active OAR Federal employees in the NOAA Management Analysis and Reporting System (MARS) as of July 10, 2019 and the NOAA Directory for the Affiliates at CIs and Contractors.
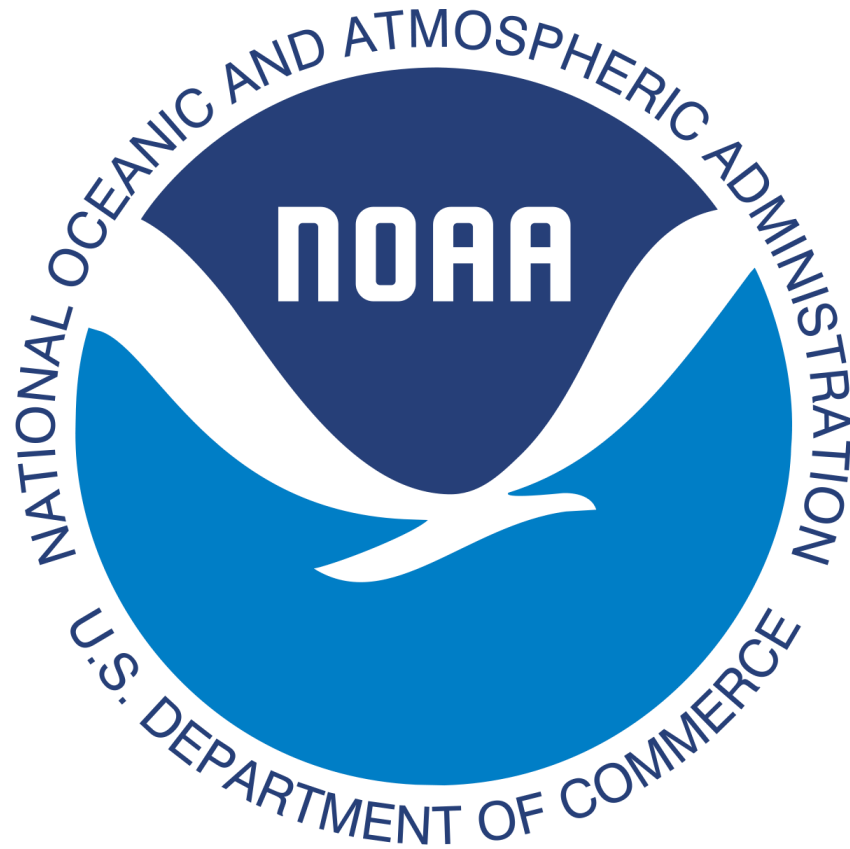
OHCA High-Level Findings
by Dimension

Autonomy Findings

Definition

The amount of perceived freedom, independence, and discretion to schedule work, choose methods used to perform work, and make decisions about work.

Strengths

- **Supervisors and Federal POCs empower employees to determine how to execute their daily tasks**

- **Employees have the freedom to make important decisions about their work and seek guidance from their supervisor if needed**

Explore options to alleviate administrative burden created by increased numbers of non-federal employees; act on reality/perception of status-based autonomy

Areas for Improvement

- **Federal staff note a burden of additional administrative responsibilities – CIs and contractors cannot perform inherently governmental functions**

- **CIs, administrative federal employees, and federal employees without PhDs do not always enjoy the same freedom in their roles as their counterparts**

Collaboration Findings

Definition

Two or more employees, teams, work groups, or departments working together toward shared goals; Employee perception of the extent to which OAR values, encourages, facilitates, and engages in collaboration.

Strengths

- **Collaboration among Lab/Office Leadership is visible to employees and perceived as important in achieving results for OAR**

- **Recent cross-Lab meetings/ conferences were seen as a positive step in establishing relationships**

- **Many employees noted regular, successful within-Lab/Office collaboration**

Continue to define and publicize the role of Portfolio Stewards in fostering collaboration; invest in internal and external forums that result in collaborations

Areas for Improvement

- **Competition for resources/ assignments between Labs and between Programs can impede collaboration opportunities**

- **Ways to find opportunities for collaboration across Labs/Offices is not always clear**

- **Employees are not aware of the Portfolio Steward positions or their roles in fostering collaboration**

Communication Findings

Definition

Employee perception of how information is shared throughout the organization.

Strengths

- **Employees utilize multiple communication methods to obtain OAR-related information**

- **Communication within work groups is typically interactive and transparent**

- **Supervisors, Federal POCs, Lab/Office Leadership, and University Employers regularly communicate important information/news to employees**

Areas for Improvement

- **Heavy reliance on peers/"the grapevine" as a primary information source leads to confusion through the spread of misinterpreted information**

- **Top-down communication and data requests/taskers from OAR HQ often lack context and follow-up**

- **Absence of standardized, Lab/Office-specific mechanisms for knowledge sharing increases the time required for new employees to get up to speed**

Better internal communications up, down, and laterally will improve performance/cohesiveness; increase resources for internal communications

Diversity Findings

Definition

Employee perception of the extent to which the organization values diversity based on its practices, procedures, and rewards.

Strengths	Areas for Improvement

Strengths

- **Strong commitment to improving personal diversity awareness**

- **The need for greater diversity is regularly communicated to employees**

- **The value of diversity is recognized by all levels of management and leadership in OAR**

Demonstrate mission impact of diversity through examples of better decisions and outcomes; document and set expectations on using successful methods

Areas for Improvement

- **"Learned helplessness" around the hiring process and workforce management system limits creativity on diversity**

- **The need for increased diversity is too often centered around compliance instead of mission success**

- **Successful methods for increasing staff diversity are not shared across OAR**

Inclusion Findings

Definition

The degree to which an employee feels like an esteemed member of the Lab/Office by experiencing treatment that makes one feel safe, valued, and fully engaged while being allowed/encouraged to retain their own uniqueness.

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
▪ **Employees at all levels report practicing inclusive behaviors and seeking other frames of reference when making decisions at work** ▪ **The value supervisors, Federal POCs, and Lab/Office Leadership place on utilizing employees' unique strengths and abilities is seen by most employees**	▪ **Feelings of exclusion from decision making, rewards, and awards were noted among non-federal employees, non-PhD employees, and administrative employees** ▪ **Varying interpretation and application of the CI, contractor, and foreign national rules and regulations contribute to feelings of exclusion**

Leadership, managers, and principal scientists need to model inclusive behaviors and exhibit no tolerance for status-based exclusions; better communicate CI, contractor, and foreign national restrictions and reasons for restrictions

Management Control Findings

Definition

Employee perception of the structure of informal and formal systems for assigning, monitoring, and evaluating work.

Strengths	Areas for Improvement

Strengths

- **With some variation, employees see effective balance between oversight/control and unit/individual degrees of freedom needed to run Labs/Offices effectively and conduct research**

- **Perception of a strong voice within own Lab/Office in setting priorities and determining resource allocation**

Expand coaching program; develop leadership training that underpins OAR values

Areas for Improvement

- **Wide variation in perception of drivers for change and outside mandates and their impact on setting direction**

- **Labs are more responsive to scientific review feedback; Offices are more responsive to internal mandates**

- **There are few performance indicators to reflect oversight/ management performance outside of Lab reviews and Operational & Management (O&M) reviews**

Definitions

Mission-Purpose Alignment: Employee understanding of and line of sight to OAR's mission and goals.

Work Motivation: Internal and external forces that drive employees at work.

Innovation: Perception of OAR's risk profile and willingness to take and manage innovative risks.

Strengths

- **Strong connection to the NOAA mission across OAR; good connection to specific Lab/Office value across staff groups**

- **High job satisfaction – meaning and impact found in the work with some variation by Lab or Office**

- **Strong intrinsic motivation inherent in the work itself – to advance the science for impact**

Conduct open dialogue on research to operations vs. broader science scope; leverage staff's strong mission orientation through better leadership engagement

Areas for Improvement

- **Conflict between OAR's research to operations focus and broad scope atmospheric and oceanic research with application for NOAA and other stakeholders**

- **Ambiguity regarding OAR-specific mission and its relation to the NOAA overall mission needs**

- **Increased clarity in how priorities are determined is needed as reflected by staff**

- **Gaps in leadership skills and abilities were identified by staff**

Stakeholder Value Findings

Employee understanding of stakeholders and how their individual work/role serves these stakeholders.

Strengths

- **Employees reported strong relationships with NOAA Line Offices and other stakeholders**

- **Federal and CI employees were readily able to identify their primary stakeholders**

- **Both federal and CI employees indicated NOAA Line Offices and Lab/Office Leadership recognize and communicate their value directly to them**

Continue to improve NOAA and external communications for engagement and support

Areas for Improvement

- **Greater outreach and advertisement to all stakeholders and the Public would help engagement**

- **Many employees noted they struggled to identify and understand key stakeholder relationships when first hired**

- **Lab employees noted NOAA Line Offices are not always able to transition research to operations when their product/model is ready**